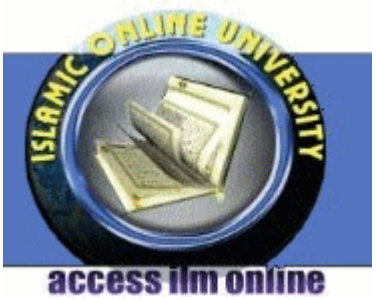

Islamic Online University

The Three Shelters

A Commentary on Chapters 112, 113 & 114 of the Qur'aan

[Also Known as the Three Quls]

By

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Module 6

تفسير سورة الفلق

Tafseer Soorah al-Falaq

Verse 2

﴿ مِن شَرِّ مَا خَلَقَ ۝٢ ﴾

2. "From the evil of created things."

The following verses beginning with verse two identify precisely the main things that human beings are instructed to seek refuge in Allaah from since He alone can provide protection ultimately.

﴿ مِن شَرِّ مَا خَلَقَ ﴾

"From the evil of created things," means from the evil of all created things including first and foremost one's own soul, for it is the human soul that usually prods the body to commit evil, as Allaah quoted Prophet Yoosuf (peace be on him) as saying:

﴿ وَمَآ أُبَرِّئُ نَفۡسِيٓۚ إِنَّ ٱلنَّفۡسَ لَأَمَّارَةُۢ بِٱلسُّوٓءِ إِلَّا مَا رَحِمَ رَبِّيٓۚ ﴾

"And I do not declare myself innocent. Indeed, the soul is inclined to evil, except when my Lord bestows His Mercy." (*Soorah Yoosuf,* 12: 53)

Whenever the Prophet (ﷺ) gave a sermon, he used to include in his opening statement which he taught his companions, a plea for refuge from the soul's evil saying:

((وَنَعُوذُ بِاللهِ مِنْ شُرُورِ أَنْفُسِنَا.))

"*Na'oothu billaahi min shuroori anfusinaa.*[1] (We seek refuge from the evil of our selves.)"[2]

﴿ مِن شَرِّ ﴾

[1] *Tafseer al-Qur'aan al-Kareem,* Juz 'Amm, p. 356.
[2] *Musnad Ahmad,* vol. 1, p. 302 and authenticated in *Badaa'i' at-Tafseer,* vol. 5, p. 387.

"From the evil …"

According to Ibn al-Qayyim, there are basically two types of evil which can befall a person:

1. Either sins committed for which he is being punished. In this case, the occurrence of evil is due to the person's own actions, intentions and efforts. This type of evil is the "Sins and their Consequences", which is the greater of the two types of evil, the more prolonged and more severe on the sinner.
2. Or evil befalling the person from others who are either responsible or not responsible. The responsible being is either similar to the person as in the case of another human being, or dissimilar as in the case of the jinn. The non-responsible sources include pests which bite and sting, and so on.[3]

THE REALITY OF EVIL

Regarding the reality of evil, Ibn al-Qayyim stated the following:

The term "evil" (*sharr*) is used to refer to two things: (a) pain, and (b) its cause, and nothing else. Thus, evils are pains and sufferings as well as their causes. Sins, disbelief, *Shirk* and the various forms of oppression are all evils, even though one who does them fulfills a wish and experiences pleasure. However, they are evils nonetheless, because they are causes for great suffering and lead to them in the same way that other causes lead to their effects. Pain is the consequence of them just as death is the consequence of consuming poison, being slaughtered, burning by fire, and strangulation by a rope, and other causes which lead to inescapable effects as long as no obstacles prevent them, or the cause is opposed by something more powerful than it and stronger in necessitating its opposite. For example, the cause of sins is opposed by the strength of faith, by great good deeds or the abundance of good deeds both of which erase sins, their quantity or quality may become greater than the causes of punishment and the more powerful will repel the weaker.[4] That is the case in all opposing causes like health and illness and the causes of weakness and strength.

[3] *Badaa'i' at-Tafseer*, vol. 5. p. 382.
[4] The good may be so great as to convert sins into good deeds, as the Almighty said:

The point is that these causes which contain some enjoyment, delight and pleasure are evil, even if the soul experiences some immediate happiness. They are like tasty delicious food containing poison. If the eater consumes it, he finds it tasty and enjoys swallowing it, and after a short while it does its job. The same is the case of sins and misdeeds, without a doubt. Even if the Lawgiver had not informed us about it, reality, personal experience and common experience are among the greatest witnesses to that. Has anyone's blessing been removed by anything besides the evil portent of his sins? For if Allaah blesses a person, He protects the blessing and does not change it until the person's evil efforts causes its change:

﴿ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوۡمٍ حَتَّىٰ يُغَيِّرُواْ مَا بِأَنفُسِهِمۡ ﴾

"Indeed! Allaah will not change the (good) condition of a people as long as they do not change their state (of goodness) themselves." (*Soorah ar-Ra'd,* 13: 11)

﴿ ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَمۡ يَكُ مُغَيِّرٗا نِّعۡمَةً أَنۡعَمَهَا عَلَىٰ قَوۡمٍ حَتَّىٰ يُغَيِّرُواْ مَا بِأَنفُسِهِمۡ ﴾

"That is so because Allaah will never change a grace which He has bestowed on a people until they change what is in their own selves." (*Soorah al-Anfaal,* 8: 53)

﴿ إِلَّا مَن تَابَ وَءَامَنَ وَعَمِلَ عَمَلٗا صَٰلِحٗا فَأُوْلَٰٓئِكَ يُبَدِّلُ ٱللَّهُ سَيِّـَٔاتِهِمۡ حَسَنَٰتٖۗ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ غَفُورٗا رَّحِيمٗا ٧٠ ﴾

"Except those who repent, believe, and do righteous deeds; for those, Allaah will change their sins into good deeds, and Allaah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful." (*Soorah al-Furqaan,* 25: 70)

If one reflects on what Allaah has related in His Book regarding the conditions of nations whose blessings He removed, he will find that the cause in all cases is none other than violation of His commands and disobedience of His messengers. Likewise, if one looks at the conditions of the people of his time whose blessings Allaah took away, he will find it to be the evil consequence of sins. As the poet said:

إِذَا كُنْتَ فِي نِعْمَةٍ فَارْعَهَا * فَإِنَّ الْمَعَاصِي تُزِيلُ النِّعَمَ

When you are in a blessed state, take care of it

For surely sins remove blessings

Nothing protects Allaah's blessings better than obedience to Him and nothing causes them to increase better than showing gratitude to Him. And nothing causes the loss of a person's blessings worse than disobedience of his Lord. For indeed it is the fire of blessing which consumes it the way that fire consumes dry wood. One who journeys with his thoughts through the conditions of the world does not need anyone else to explain them to him.The point is that these causes are definite evils.

Regarding the fact that their effects are also evils, it is because sufferings are spiritual and physical. The severity of the physical pain combines with the spiritual pains of worries, grief, sadness and regret which befall the sinner. If a sane intelligent person properly understood this, he would take every possible precaution to avoid it and seriously flee from it. However, the veil of negligence is drawn over his heart in order that Allaah would bring to pass what He decided to do in eternity.

If he was truly alert and mindful, his soul would be torn to shreds in this life by his regrets over the current and coming good opportunities granted to him by Allaah which he missed. Instead, this reality will become fully apparent to him only when he is leaving this world and on seeing the eternal world. Then he will say:

﴿ يَٰلَيۡتَنِى قَدَّمۡتُ لِحَيَاتِى ﴾

"Oh no! If I had only done something for my life!" (*Soorah al-Fajr,* 89: 24)

﴿ يَـٰحَسۡرَتَىٰ عَلَىٰ مَا فَرَّطتُ فِي جَنۢبِ ٱللَّهِ ﴾

"Oh no! I regret my negligence of my duty to Allâh." (*Soorah az-Zumar,* 39: 56)

Since evil is sufferings and their causes, all of the Prophet's pleas for refuge were centered on these two principles. Everything that he sought refuge from or instructed that refuge be sought from is either painful or a cause leading to it. Thus, he used to seek refuge at the end of his formal prayers from four things and commanded that refuge be sought from them.[5]

Ibn 'Abbaas related that Allaah's Messenger (ﷺ) used to teach them this prayer (*du'aa*) the same way that he used to teach them a chapter (*soorah*) from the Qur'aan saying:

((إِنَّ رَسُولَ اللهِ كَانَ يُعَلِّمُهُمْ هَذَا الدُّعَاءَ كَمَا يُعَلِّمُهُمُ السُّورَةَ مِنَ الْقُرْآنِ))

So much stress was placed on it that, Ibn 'Abbaas' student, Taawoos was reported to have asked his son on one occasion whether he had made the supplication in his prayer and when he told him that he had not, Taawoos told him to repeat his prayer.[6] A number of the Companions of the Prophet (ﷺ) narrated the supplication, among them 'Aa'ishah and Aboo Hurayrah who both quoted the Prophet (ﷺ) as saying:

((اَللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَعُوذُ بِكَ مِنْ عَذابِ جَهَنَّمَ وَمِنْ عَذابِ الْقَبْرِ وَمِنْ فِتْنَةِ الْمَحَيَا وَالْمَمَاتِ وَمِنْ شَرِّ فِتْنَةِ الْمَسِيْحِ الدَّجَّالِ))

"*O Allaah, I seek refuge with You from the punishment of Hell, the torment of the grave, the trials of living and dying and from the evil trials of the Anti-Christ.*"[7]

"Punishments of the grave and the Hellfire," are the greatest sufferings, while "the trials of life and death and the trials of the Anti-Christ," are [the greatest] causes for painful punishment. Trials are the cause of punishment, so they were specifically mentioned including their two most severe types. Trials are either

[5] *Badaa'i' at-Tafseer*, vol. 5. pp. 383-5.
[6] *Sahih Muslim,* vol. 1, pp. 291-2, no. 1225.
[7] *Sahih Muslim,* vol. 1, p. 291, no. 1217 and *Sahih Al Bukhari,* vol. 1, pp. 441-2, no. 795.

during this life or after death. Punishment caused by the trial of life may be delayed for some time, while punishment of the trial after death is directly linked and immediate.[8] As regards the trial of the Anti-Christ, the Prophet (ﷺ) informed us that his trial would be the greatest trial of all times saying in a narration related by Hishaam ibn 'Aamir:

((مَا بَيْنَ خَلْقِ آدَمَ إِلَى قِيَامِ السَّاعَةِ أَمْرٌ (خَلْقٌ) أَكْبَرُ مِنَ الدَّجَّالِ))

"*There is no trial from the time of Aadam's creation until the Last Hour greater than Dajjaal.*"[9]

Another example can be found in the Prophet's (ﷺ) supplication seeking refuge from distress and worry narrated by Anas ibn Maalik:

((اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَعُوذُ بِكَ مِنْ الْهَمِّ وَالْحَزَنِ وَالْعَجْزِ وَالْكَسَلِ وَالْجُبْنِ وَالْبُخْلِ وَضَلَعِ الدَّيْنِ وَغَلَبَةِ الرِّجَالِ)).

"*Allaahumma innee a'oothu bika minal-hammi wal-hazan wal-'ajzi wal-kasal wal-jubni wal-bukhl wa dala'id-dayn wa ghalabatir-rijaal* [O Allaah, I seek refuge in You from worry and sadness, from incapacity and laziness, from miserliness and cowardice, and from being overcome by debt or overpowered by others]."[10]

The Prophet (ﷺ) sought refuge in eight things in which the members of each pair are companions of each other:

1. Grief and sadness are companions, and they are among the spiritual pains and the soul's torments. The difference between the two is that worry (*hamm*) is in regard to evil expected to occur in the future, while sadness and grief is suffering over the occurrence of something disliked in the past, or the loss of something dear.
2. Incapacity - failure and laziness are also companions, both of which are causes of pain because they necessitate the passing of something desirable. Incapacity necessitates inability and laziness necessitates lack of desire. So the soul suffers pain when what is desired is missed according to the degree of its attachment to it and its enjoyment of it if it occurred.

[8] *Badaa'i' at-Tafseer,* vol. 5. p. 385.
[9] *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 4, p. 1525, no. 7037.
[10] *Sahih Al Bukhari,* vol. 8, p. 210, no. 6369, Kitaab: ad Da'awaat; Baab: al Isti'aath minal jubun wal kasal.

3. Miserliness and cowardice are also companions because they are a lack of benefit from wealth and health, and they are also among the causes of suffering. Because the coward misses out on great beloved, enjoyable and pleasurable things which can only be gained by expending effort and bravery, and miserliness comes between him and them. These two characteristics are among the greatest causes of suffering and pain.
4. Being overcome by debt and overpowered by others are companions which torment the soul and cause spiritual suffering. One of them is legitimate and it is usually the person's own fault, unpaid debts, while the other is illegitimate and not by his choice, the oppression from others.[11]

TWO TYPES OF EVIL

Refuge is sought from two types of evil: (a) Existing evil whose removal is sought, and (b) Non-existing evil whose continued state of non-existence is sought. Likewise, there are two types of general good: (a) Existing good whose continuance is sought and whose removal is sought not to take place, and (b) Non-existing good whose existence is sought and whose occurrence is desired. These four represent the essence of what is sought in prayers from the Lord of the Worlds.

The Prophet's (ﷺ) statement from the beginning of his sermons:

((وَنَعُوذُ بِاللهِ مِنْ شُرُورِ أَنْفُسِنَا وَسَيِّئَاتِ أَعْمَالِنَا.))

"*Na'oothu billaahi min shuroori anfusinaa wa sayyi'aati a'maalinaa*. (We seek refuge from the evil of our selves and the evil results of our deeds.)"[12]

This statement contains a plea for refuge from the evil of the soul which is non-existing evil, but it is a part of the soul. So its repulsion and non-existence is requested. On the other hand, "the evil results of our deeds" has two interpretations:

1. That he sought refuge from evil deeds which occurred. In that case, the *hadeeth* covers both types of evil.

[11] *Badaa'i' at-Tafseer,* vol. 5. pp. 385-6.
[12] *Musnad Ahmad,* vol. 1, p. 302 and authenticated in *Badaa'i' at-Tafseer,* vol. 5, p. 387.

2. That "the evil results of our deeds" are the punishments and other evil consequences which will affect the doer. In this case it is refuge from the effects while the first request is refuge from the cause. A case of seeking refuge from pain and its cause.[13]

﴿ مِن شَرِّ مَا خَلَقَ ﴾

"From the evil of created things," literally: "From the evil of what He created." Thus, the evil is attributed to the created being that did it and not to the Lord's creative act which is free from evil from all perspectives. Evil does not enter any aspect of Allaah's Attributes or Acts, nor is it attributable to His Essence, Most Blessed and Transcendent. For His essence is absolutely perfect, free of any deficiency from any perspective. Similarly, His Attributes and Acts are absolutely perfect and free from any fault. All of His acts are purely good and free from any evil in their foundation. If the Almighty did evil acts, He would have derived a name for Himself expressing it and all of His Names would not be good.[14]

What He does in being just to His creatures and punishment for those who deserve punishment is pure good as it is absolute justice and wisdom. It is only evil relative to them as it is linked to them and occurs to them, and not in Allaah's Acts. However, we do not deny that evil occurs in the unconnected bi-products of His creation, for He is ultimately the creator of good and evil.[15]

Two points should be kept in mind in this regard:

1. Whatever is evil or contains evil is only a separate bi-product of His Acts and not one of His essential attributes or an attribute of His actions.
2. The evilness of anything is relative and not original. For it is good when attributed to the Lord, to His creation and to His Wish, but evil when attributed to one who is himself evil.

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[13] *Badaa'i' at-Tafseer*, vol. 5. pp. 387-8.

[14] But Allaah said that all His names are good:

﴿ وَلِلَّهِ ٱلْأَسْمَآءُ ٱلْحُسْنَىٰ فَٱدْعُوهُ بِهَا ﴾

"And (all) the Most Beautiful Names belong to Allâh, so call on Him by them." (*Soorah al-A'raaf*, 7: 180)

[15] Allaah stated that He is the creator of everything:

﴿ وَخَلَقَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ ﴾

"He created all things." (*Soorah al-An'aam*, 6: 101)

For example, cutting the hand of the thief is evil relative to the thief, but absolutely good for the society due to its effect in protecting their property, and repelling evil from them, and it is good relative to the one who is instructed by law to cut the thief's hand, due to the general goodness resulting from the removal of this harmful limb.[16]

It is in this context that 'Alee ibn Abee Taalib quoted the Prophet (ﷺ) as saying the following whenever he stood up for prayer:

((لَبَّيْكَ وَسَعْدَيْكَ وَالْخَيْرُ كُلُّهُ فِي يَدَيْكَ وَالشَّرُّ لَيْسَ إِلَيْكَ))

"*Here I am, in answer to Your call, happy to serve You. All good is in Your Hands and evil does not stem from You.*"[17]

Thus, the Qur'aan either attributes evil to its cause or the doer, or it deletes the doer all together. When referring to good, Allaah attributes it directly to Himself, but when referring to evil, He deletes Himself. This can be observed in the opening chapter of the Qur'aan, *al-Faatihah,* where it states in the last verse:

﴿ صِرَٰطَ ٱلَّذِينَ أَنۡعَمۡتَ عَلَيۡهِمۡ غَيۡرِ ٱلۡمَغۡضُوبِ عَلَيۡهِمۡ وَلَا ٱلضَّآلِّينَ ۝٧ ﴾

"The path of those whom You have blessed, and not (the path) of those with whom there is anger, nor of those who are lost." (*Soorah al-Faatihah,* 1: 7)

Similarly, with regard to beautifying things for people, Allaah said:

﴿ وَلَٰكِنَّ ٱللَّهَ حَبَّبَ إِلَيۡكُمُ ٱلۡإِيمَٰنَ وَزَيَّنَهُۥ فِي قُلُوبِكُمۡ ﴾

"But Allâh has endeared faith to you and has beautified it in your hearts." (*Soorah al-Hujaraat,* 49: 7)

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[16] *Badaa'i' at-Tafseer,* vol. 5. pp. 389-1.
[17] *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 1, p. 373-374, no. 1695, Kitaab: Salaat al musaafireen wa qasruhaa; Baab: du'aa fee salaat al layl wa qiyaamih.

Here, Allaah openly attributes the beautification of faith in human hearts to Himself.

﴿ زُيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ حُبُّ ٱلشَّهَوَٰتِ مِنَ ٱلنِّسَآءِ وَٱلْبَنِينَ ﴾

"Beautified for men is the love of things they covet; women and children." (*Soorah Aal 'Imraan,* 3: 14)

However, in this verse the beautification of elements of Allaah's creation which appeal to basic human desires is not attributed to Allaah. Instead it is just described as having been beautified.[18]

﴿ وَزَيَّنَ لَهُمُ ٱلشَّيْطَٰنُ مَا كَانُوا۟ يَعْمَلُونَ ﴾

"Satan beautified for them what they used to do." (*Soorah al-An'aam,* 6: 43)

In this verse, the beautification of evil deeds is attributed openly to Satan, the active agent, who can only do so with Allaah's permission.

Ibn al-Qayyim added the point that seeking refuge from the evil of what Allaah created refers to the evil which may come from some of Allaah's creation and not that evil may come from all of Allaah's creation, for there is no evil which will or could come from paradise.[19]

In the following three verses, Allaah then goes on to mention details of the most common evils which may come from His creation

[18] *Badaa'i' at-Tafseer,* vol. 5. pp. 394-5.
[19] *Badaa'i' at-Tafseer,* vol. 5. p. 396.